**Saturday 22 December 2020**

**Dear Member – Annwyl Aelod,**

I hope that you and your family are well and are looking forward to a very different kind of Christmas this year. It has been a year like no other for our community and our rugby club and I hope that you will be enjoying a well-earned break in the coming days. To those of you who are keyworkers who will be working over the Christmas period, as ever, you have my appreciation and respect – now more than ever.

I wanted to write to you as 2020 draws to a close to express my thanks on behalf of Bedwas RFC for your support over the last year. I think plenty has been said about the flooding and the pandemic and so I would like to take this opportunity just to say *thank you* to those people who have kept the show on the road.

Firstly, I would like to thank the players, coaches and team managers for their efforts this year. It would have been easy to put rugby on the backburner this year, but the motivation shown by our players, coaches and team managers – at all levels – has been great to see. Our senior players have been kept up to their work and the coaches have done very well to adapt to the new way of working. Our youth team have also been very impressive, training twice a week despite there being no rugby in prospect for them just yet. Lastly, our mini and junior teams have also done a sterling job of adapting to COVID safe rugby training and the committee have shown great initiative, particularly in their online fundraising efforts.

Secondly, I would like to thank our staff for their persistence and adaptability in the face of constantly changing circumstances. They have adapted to all the changing rules and regulations without complaint and done a great job of keeping the clubhouse open. Despite the uncertainty over the furlough scheme and the shifting goalposts, they have put their best foot forward every time and I look forward to welcoming them back to work as soon as we are able.

Thirdly, I would like to thank our off-pitch volunteers. Members, committee and local heroes alike, so many have given so much to our club over the last year. Without their selfless, relentless commitment to this club, we would simply not be here. Moreover, I would like to thank my fellow Directors for all their work and for being there for the club, day after day.

Finally, I would like to thank our friends at the Welsh Rugby Union for their support over the last year. We have had excellent communication from the Union and their support has been invaluable to us.

Now, I do not wish to moan or complain – we have weathered the storm of 2020 and stand ready for a brighter 2021. That being said, I must highlight some of the challenges we have been presented with that could otherwise be avoided.

I would like to think that both the Welsh and UK Governments are doing the best they can in unimaginably difficult circumstances. However, the constant changing of regulations and the complex and uncertain nature of financial support for businesses like ours is a constant headache.

We are a voluntarily-run rugby club, not a restaurant or a gastropub. At present, if we are unable to serve alcohol we are essentially unable to remain open. This being the case, we need bespoke, easy to access support to get us through the current set of circumstances. We have worked hard to adhere to and to adapt to all the necessary rules and I am proud to say that we have been inspected several times by Caerphilly County Council and not once have been issued with any kind of reprimand or improvement notice. In our opinion, we are a safe, sociable environment, giving people of different ages and backgrounds a place to safely socialise, which is critical for their mental wellbeing in these trying times. We simply cannot understand the evidential basis for restrictions that constantly hammer businesses like ours.

I implore policymakers to take the time and consideration to give Wales’ rugby clubs the support they need. We don’t get money from the council – our pitches and changing rooms, which are a huge community asset, are funded by *you* (our members), sponsors, customers and the WRU. In a recent interview, First Minister Mark Drakeford stated that he thought it would be some time before ‘wet pubs’ re-open. If that is his view, then surely further support must be forthcoming to get us through the coming weeks and months.

Looking ahead to 2021, it was very positive to see that the WRU have published their intentions for rugby next year. As a Championship club, we stand ready to make our return to rugby once it is sanctioned by the Union and Welsh Government. The Union has plans in place and we will all await the decision of the Welsh Government as to when we can proceed. Let’s hope that this means that we will also be able to expand the functions and hospitality part of our business soon, once infection rates drop and the vaccination programme progresses.

For now, we are prepared for a very low-key winter. The club will remain closed until Wales is moved out of Level 4 restrictions and we are able to welcome you back. It is very sad to be missing out on our traditional Boxing Day festivities here, but we know that we’re moving in the right direction and it won’t be too long I hope before we can enjoy our club once again.

I hope that you and your families have a wonderful Christmas together. I’m sure that you will all raise a glass to absent friends and to those among us who are on the frontline of the pandemic. Our club will still be here when we can come back – ready to welcome one and all to the heart of our community.

Nadolig llawen a blwyddyn newydd dda i chi gyd.

**Best Wishes – Dymuniadau gorau,**



*Will Rees*

*Secretary*

*Bedwas RFC*